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*Volume III.*  
*Number 1.*

*January, 1895.*

*Whole*  
*Number 21.*

# THE SCHOOL REVIEW

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A JOURNAL OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

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OPENING ADDRESS ON THE QUESTION, "WHAT  
SHALL WE TEACH IN LATIN AND HOW SHALL  
WE TEACH?"

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AT THE MEETING OF THE N. E. ASS. OF COLLEGES AND PREPARA-  
TORY SCHOOLS, AT NEW HAVEN, OCTOBER 13, 1893

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Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: I have not prepared any paper, and perhaps I ought to apologize to the Association for not having done so. The truth, however, is that, in view of what I have to say, it seemed to me possible to get closer to the heart of the question, if I avoided the more formal method of treating the subject in a written essay.

You have said, Mr. President, that the subject is an old one; it is a very old one, and for my own part, I approach the discussion of it with a good many misgivings, partly because it is so old, and because it seems to me that almost everything has been said that can be said, or ought to be said. Perhaps I am the least fitted person here to say anything new, because, in scattered essays, in prefaces of books, in books themselves, and in many talks, I have said all that I know, and perhaps more than I know, about teaching Latin. But this Association was formed for the purpose of promoting education along certain lines, and I believe it to be true that progress in education is made quite as much by reviving and revamping our old ideas,

which a common man may do, as by striking out into new paths, which is in the province of rare men and men of genius.

Then, I have some misgiving on account of the largeness of the subject, for when I began to reflect upon it, I found myself in something of a maze. It was not clear to me where to begin and where to end. "What to teach in the preparatory schools in Latin and how to teach it," might well occupy us an entire afternoon; but large as the subject is, I am not satisfied without making it somewhat broader still. It seems to me that there are two topics logically antecedent to those on the paper, and I want to ask your indulgence if I begin outside of the question. It is perhaps unnecessary for me to point out closely the logical connection. I only wish to say that it seems to me that the proper subjects to teach, and particularly the proper method of teaching, must be profoundly modified by the views we take on the two topics that I propose first to speak of.

These topics are, the proper age at which Latin should be begun, and the question whether Latin occupies its proper place in the order of studies. Or, to be more definite and exact, I am going to ask whether the beginning of Latin ought to precede the beginning of French, or whether the beginning of French ought to precede the beginning of Latin. That is the first topic on which I want to say a few words.

Now, what is the fact? I believe it is hardly an exaggeration to say that almost universally, and for how long a time I know not, the custom has prevailed of beginning Latin before French. I found it so in the German Gymnasien, and nobody seems to question the propriety of that order, and I never heard it doubted. I found it so in the English schools, and I think it is almost universally so in our schools. There may be schools where Latin is deferred until after French has been studied one or two or three years, but I do not happen to know of them. If we open the catalogues of colleges, we shall find, almost without exception, that in those colleges that have a prescribed curriculum, the study of French is deferred sometimes for one, two, or three years. That is, French is taken up in

the Sophomore or Junior year. Now, I admit that the universal prevalence and the long continuance of a custom create a presumption that it has really some foundation in reason; but, when I think what probably brought this about, I imagine that it came about from the very natural and obvious reflection that it would seem most fit to begin with the primitive language instead of the derived language. Or, to put it in another form, that it is better to begin with the older form of the Latin language and proceed to its later form or development in the French language, than to reverse that process. I can think of no other reason that probably brought this about in the first place, but, when it was once established, I do not wonder that the custom has continued, because the world is ruled by custom, and there is only now and then a person who takes the trouble to think. For myself, I find that I shirk that painful operation whenever I conveniently can, and I suppose it is so with others. But the custom is not supported by analogies. If we look at the Greek language, we find that the ordinary way is not to begin with the older forms of the Greek language. We do not begin with Homer, for instance, and then take up Attic Greek, the common language, later; but we begin, as I think we ought, with Attic Greek, and then go back to the earlier Greek. Nor does this custom find analogies in any country in the study of the vernacular. One never hears of the Germans, for instance, beginning in their schools the study of their own language with the *Nibelungenlied*, and you never hear that in France they begin with the *Romance of the Rose*. Certainly the schools are few in number, I believe there are some, in this country, that think it wise to begin with Chaucer and come down through the later writers to the present. The custom is pretty general, and it seems to me it is wise, to begin with contemporary writers and go back through the older to the oldest. But if we look at the reasons for reversing this process, beginning with French and going to Latin, it seems to me there are several very strong considerations, and I want to ask your attention to a few of them.

The first is, that it seems a natural process for us to go from English to Latin through French, because French is a natural bridge from English to Latin. French is a kind of half-way station between those two languages. The English language is, speaking generally an uninflected language, the Latin language is a highly inflected language; the French is a partially inflected language. Now, there is a prodigious chasm between the uninflected English and the highly inflected Latin, and if we can bridge it in point of inflections, and this is a very difficult matter for anybody to master, through the French, then I think there is a clear gain. Then, with regard to the vocabulary of the languages, you may say that the vocabulary of the French language is half-way between the English and Latin; that French words, in their present form, are about as much like the present form of English words, derived from Latin and from French, as they are like the Latin. And if you will look at the order, nearly the same thing may be said to be true. Undoubtedly, the French order is more like the order in English than it is like the order in Latin, but if you study difficult French, you find oftener that the order is a great deal like Latin. I conclude, then, that in the three particulars of the inflections, the vocabulary, and the order, we may fairly say that French would serve as a bridge to Latin, and would make Latin easier. I think this is confirmed by the fact, as I have been told, that French boys and girls learn Latin a great deal more readily and quickly than English speaking boys and girls, and I should expect *a priori* to find that true.

But I suppose that the strongest argument now for maintaining the existing order would surely be that the study of Latin makes the study of French easy, and I don't deny it; that is certainly true. But we must understand what is meant. It does not make the speaking of French easy, nor the understanding of French easy, nor the writing of French easy, but it does, undoubtedly, make the reading of French very much easier, and it is the reading of French and the reading of Latin that I think we must compare in reaching a just conclusion. I

admit, then, without any hesitation, and with any degree of emphasis that you please to put upon it, the statement that Latin does facilitate the study of French. But I am not satisfied to stop there. I ask you, which is the language to be made easy? Is it Latin, or is it French?

Now I affirm that the French language, I am still speaking of reading, is ten times as easy as Latin. In other words, that a tenth of the time devoted to the reading of French would enable a learner to read common French books with ease and pleasure, that would be required to enable him to read Latin with ease and pleasure. That, for a general statement, I believe, can be well-maintained. Latin is an immensely difficult language in itself. It is a language of almost measureless difficulty. The more I teach Latin to boys the more I am sensible of the extreme difficulty of reading Latin books. Since we have been accustomed to read at sight with our classes, I have become aware, as I never was before, of the difficulty of the Latin tongue. I am not unfrequently surprised that boys with such help as is given in impromptu reading can make out the sense at all. I too often feel a certain despair of their ever being able to read without aid.

Now, difficult as the Latin language has always been, it is more difficult, I believe, for this generation of articulate speaking men than for any of those preceding; and it is more difficult because there is less faith in the value and efficacy of the study of Latin than there once was. I believe that faith in the value and efficacy of Latin is dying out; and just in proportion as it is dying out does Latin become more difficult. Whatever your own enthusiasm, you cannot resist the feeling that somehow the spirit of the times is working against you, and Young America feels it in his bones, whether he is conscious of it or not. We do not realize, perhaps, that the study of Latin in our schools is maintained in some measure by the fact that it is really subsidized. I believe, if Latin were not generally required for admission to college, that we should see much less devotion to the study than we do now. I do not think the number of

students of Latin would be at all what it is at present. The study of Latin in the schools flourishes partly, I repeat, because it is subsidized. But you will say to me, "do you see any great falling off in the number of students that choose Latin when they go to college?" I presume not. I presume it is increasing, as the total number increases, but that does not prove anything to my mind. Besides the subsidizing of Latin in the schools, which I do not complain of, there is a certain distinction attaching to classical studies that makes a great difference. I know that in school and college boys and girls who are taking Latin regard scientific and commercial courses of study as rather common and vulgar. We must add to this the fact that it is natural for students in college to carry on the studies that they have had, the studies in which they feel that their feet are on the earth, the studies in which they have had the best training.

Professor Paulsen, of Berlin, whose writings many of you are acquainted with, was asked by my friend, Dr. Bacon, of Boston, whether German graduates of the Gymnasium can read Latin with facility and pleasure, and his reply was that they could not. Four, six, or even more years of study of Latin do not enable the student to read, and I therefore say if there is any reasonable method by which we can facilitate the approach to Latin, let us by all means adopt it; and I so thoroughly believe, and have believed for years, that the previous study of French will strongly tend to that result, that I have at last emboldened myself to propose to my trustees to try the experiment in my own school.

But you may ask why do I bring up this topic here and now. Besides the reason that I have stated, I have another reason. It is very well known that the presidents of the associated colleges in New England have united in a recommendation—and I suppose it was a unanimous recommendation—to the schools, that Latin be begun in the grammar schools. It is because I wish to do something to arrest the progress of what I believe to be a great error, that I speak of this now. Already three cities close to Boston have acted on that suggestion and are putting

Latin into the grammar schools in Newton, in Winchester, and in Brookline, as I have been informed. Now I have no idea that the suggestion of the college presidents has expended its influence solely on Boston and its immediate vicinity. I presume it is having great weight, as one would suppose it ought to have, in many other places, and I believe it is a pity. I will tell you why. Because, if Latin is put back into the grammar schools, then I feel sure that the present order will be fastened upon us for decades and perhaps for a century to come. I think it is extremely improbable that, if Latin is put back generally into the grammar schools, French will be put back before it; and that boys and girls who are going to school will begin French two or three years before Latin. That cannot be expected. I think I can see how this recommendation of the presidents came about. They probably had a strong feeling that Latin ought to be begun earlier, and in that I am with them heartily. There seems to me to be no question about it. Latin is begun in this country three years, four years, five years later than it is in Europe. But, you may ask me, "what can you do?" "You would not have Latin put into the grammar schools, and yet Latin ought to be begun earlier, one, two, three years earlier." Latin is begun in this country, as nearly as can be determined, at about fifteen. I do not think we can accomplish at once, or in ten or twenty years, all that ought to be done. It would, therefore, be absurd to advise that Latin be begun, we will say, at the age of twelve, and be begun in the high schools, because that would be pushing back the beginning of the high-school course more than could be expected or asked. But I think it is very probable that the beginning of the high-school course may be pushed down one year and perhaps two years. Therefore I would have Latin begun, as it commonly is now, in the public schools, at the beginning of the high-school course, but I would push down the high-school course one or two years. This is enough on the two topics that I said were strictly antecedent to the two upon the paper. I must hasten on to the next question:



“What shall we teach in Latin in the preparatory schools?” I answer, “We *shall* teach what we *must* teach, and we must teach what the colleges require of us.” Those requirements have remained substantially fixed for a very long period in those colleges that have an entrance examination and make specific requirements. I am glad to have an opportunity to plead for a few moments for some change. It seems to me that it is about time. We have been obliged to read the same books over and over for a great many years. Is it unreasonable to say that we are getting tired of it? The first class I had to do with in our schools read certain orations of Cicero, and the last class read the same orations. In general the requirements in Latin have been certain books of Caesar, certain books of Virgil, and certain orations of Cicero. But some colleges you may say are more liberal; Harvard, for example, does not mention any author for preparation on the preliminary examination, and names only, in a general way, Cicero’s orations and Virgil for the final examination. But Harvard might as well do what other colleges do, and designate certain books of Caesar to be read, for very seldom on the preliminary examination is a passage set from any other author than Caesar. I have wondered a good many times why it is that we must continue to read Cicero’s orations, and only orations. Is there anything in the orations that makes it necessary that all that a boy gets out of Cicero should be from the orations? It seems to me that this is a great error, and for one I am anxious to see it righted. There may be some clergymen here who are partially responsible for this condition of things, by which, for generations, teachers have been obliged to tread the same round, and I want to appeal to them. I want to ask them what would be the probable effect if there were a power that could oblige clergymen to preach for twenty or twenty-five years the same sermons? I can conceive that they might improve their sermons in a sense. They might polish and refine them, they might here and there substitute a more elegant word, or give a phrase a finer rhetorical turn;

or they might in delivery gesticulate and pose more effectively; but would they continue to be a power in the pulpit? Would they be an elevating and inspiring influence? Would they convict men of sin, and make them flee from the wrath to come? Now we have been preaching our old sermons for more than twenty years, and, in my judgment, greatly to the loss of enthusiasm, and greatly to the hurt of Latin scholarship.

For one thing, we have had to read certain books of Caesar. This requirement has been more constant than any other; and through the unintended exaltation of Caesar, from the demands of the colleges,—since Caesar is the first book that they name for preparation,—through the unintended exaltation of Caesar, I say, it has come about that very often two years out of the four of a boy's or girl's preparatory course is spent upon Caesar. I scarcely ever take up a book nowadays for beginners, that doesn't seek to recommend itself to teachers of preparatory schools by this claim,—that it leads to Caesar,—leads straight to Caesar! So that, if you will give the first year to Caesar's Gallic War in a beginner's book, and then spend another year on the same work, you will have your boys and girls prepared for the preliminary examination. Now if Caesar's Gallic War were a vastly better book than it is, I should think that this was a deplorable condition of things, and it is growing worse. I think that the fashion of aiming to reach Caesar as soon as possible at a gallop, as it were, is working great injury to the study of Latin.

But what is Caesar's Gallic War? It is a military history and nothing more. It is an account of ruthless conquest, of cruel subjugation and enslavement; it is, almost from beginning to end, a story of marches, sieges, plots, counter-plots, ambuscades, battles, defeats, victories, and massacres. It seems to me singularly wanting in literary charm, it is monotonous, and after a while, dreadfully wearisome. To many it is as dry as Sahara. It touches modern human interests and human life at singularly few points. I do not know what lesson it affords for the conduct of life for old or young. I do not know what

ideals Caesar's Gallic War sets before us that we should want to impress upon the heart or imagination of our boys and girls.

But you may say, "Isn't there the grand figure of Caesar always present, always impressive to the last degree?" I object to the word "grand," because that, to my mind, suggests something of nobility, and I confess that I cannot see much that is noble in Caesar's character generally, and nothing at all in his dealings with those whom he calls in the Gallic War "barbarians." If you say he is a colossal man, I agree; a most consummate general, and a most consummate politician; but, unless I read his character wrongly, his selfishness is as colossal as his genius, and for heart, his heart is as hard as marble to all who are not Romans, in spite of the fact that he says so much about his clemency, for which he seemed, somehow, to have gained a reputation.

Let us consider how he treated individual men. You remember Divico, a chieftain at his headquarters, who, after a time, began to show signs of discontent and backsliding into patriotism. Caesar had him struck down like a dog. Gutruatus, for the monstrous crime of inciting his people to defend their liberties, was by Caesar's orders, perhaps in his presence, flogged to death. You may recall what happened when Uxelodunum was taken. Every individual brave man had his right hand chopped off; an abominable, wanton, inexpressible cruelty, which is without a parallel. Do you recollect the story of Vercingetorix, who was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of saving his countrymen? He despaired of saving Alesia. Perhaps he hoped for pardon, for he had been Caesar's friend. He went to Caesar's tent, sank down on his knees and joined his hands in silent supplication. What would a noble man in Caesar's place have done? He would have looked upon his former friend, and have told him to rise and go forth a free man. What did he do? He cast him into chains. He sent him to Rome. He confined him in a Roman dungeon six years. He exhibited him in his triumphal procession after his African victories; and, on the last day, when the sun had

set upon that wondrous pageant, he sent his executioner and had Vercingetorix strangled in his dungeon.

The fate of individuals, brave men like these, touches the heart, but with what feelings do we read of the doom meted out to whole nations? When Avaricum was taken, all but eight hundred out of forty thousand were butchered. *Non aetate confectis, non mulieribus, non infantibus pepercerunt milites.* These are the words that Caesar writes, with a calm satisfaction, apparently, at the thoroughness with which the soldiers did their work. "The soldiers spared neither those who were worn out with age, nor women; no, nor little toddling children." You remember the Nervii in the second book of Caesar's Gallic War, which every boy and girl reads. When they had fought against Caesar to their uttermost; what was left of the nation? *Prope ad internecionem gente ac nomine Nerviorum redacto*: the race and name of the Nervii were almost exterminated. Three senators left out of six hundred, and five hundred fighting men remaining out of sixty thousand. I might give other examples to show how he dealt with nations, but these will suffice. For my own part I shudder as I read those seemingly insignificant words that Caesar sometimes uses in reference to a people whom he has conquered: "These Caesar considered in the light of enemies,"—in a word, murdered or enslaved.

I have said that Caesar's Gallic War is a military history. I may say now that it is a bloody history, perhaps the bloodiest that has come down to us from that cruel, ancient world. And this is the book that, partly by definite prescription of the colleges, and partly—if you will pardon me for saying it—by what seems to me the infatuation of schoolmasters, our boys and girls are kept upon one and sometimes two years, at the most impressionable period of their lives. I don't want to be misunderstood. You will gather by this time that I want to see Caesar dethroned, and I do; but I do not want to see his work entirely cast aside and altogether disused. I am willing to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but I don't want

him to have the world. That is what I am contending for.

Now after this somewhat destructive criticism, it is right that I should have some practical suggestion, and it is a very simple one that I have to make. I do not plead for the utter absence of requirements. To tell the truth, I do not quite like the way the Harvard requirements are put. I have already stated what I think are the objections to the requirements of Orations from Cicero, and nothing else. Why may not certain Essays of Cicero, as the Cato Major, or the De Amicitia, or certain of Cicero's letters, be recommended or required? Are they too easy for the preparatory schools? Is the Oration for Archias eminently suited to the capacities of boys and girls, and not the Essay on Old Age? I do not, I repeat, plead for the utter absence of requirements. I think nothing could be better than for the colleges at least to recommend the reading of certain books. But let us have a little variety. We have had, as I have said, for the period of generations, practically the same books prescribed. Why may not the colleges agree that they will do what has been done in regard to English,—designate certain books to be read, or only recommend, if you please, for five years, and then let us change and take something else? Perhaps one book, or two books might be changed, or even three books, every five years. In this way we should travel a little out of the ruts, the classics would, I believe, be better taught in the schools, and the girls and boys would feel the effect of the fresh enthusiasm, and the larger knowledge that would come to the teachers in consequence. What a simple change that would be! How reasonable it seems! Will not this Association agree that that is the thing that ought to be done? I am seeking all the time for ways by which I think that classical study may be saved, and, if possible, be advanced. Let us import a little more—shall I say common sense,—into our work. Let us try to make our work more delightful to our pupils, and more interesting to ourselves, and the study of the classics will have a

longer lease of life, and perhaps will not need, as now, to be subsidized in the schools.

I have spoken too long already, but there is a great deal that I should be glad to say further on this topic. I leave it to say a single word or two in regard to the last subject, namely, "How shall we teach?" I foresee that to deal at any length with this part of the subject, would lead to a multitude of details. I find, personally, that it is an extremely difficult thing to tell anybody how I would teach this or that. It seems to me, when I begin to describe a method, very flat and commonplace; and I am almost prepared to expect the remark from any person who seems to be interested, "Well, is that the whole of it?" It is next to impossible to describe an oral method, and I do not think this is the proper occasion for going into the details of instruction in Latin. But it is possible that some slight service may be done by pointing out what I conceive to be a great error in the rudimentary study and teaching of Latin, and one important error in the more advanced study.

There is prevalent at the present time a feeling that in the first year the learner should handle but few words; that he should not deal with, perhaps, more than five or six or seven hundred words, and that they should be worked over and over and over until they are thoroughly implanted in his memory. Now in my judgment no mistake could be greater. I first ask the question, What is the reason that we cannot read a foreign language? Why can anyone not read Greek, or Latin, French, German, or Italian books with readiness? The reason is ignorance of the vocabulary. Ignorance of the vocabulary, I believe, constitutes three-fourths of the difficulty. Therefore, I am very decidedly of the opinion that the learner in the first year, instead of having a very few words, should be introduced to a large number of words; not too many, but as opposed to the idea of five, or six, or seven hundred words, as have been recommended, I should say fifteen hundred or two thousand words would be nearer the mark. I make bold to say that it is

a great deal better to half learn two thousand words,—to know something about them than it is to study and to ‘master,’ as is said, five or six or seven hundred words. But what is meant by ‘mastery’? I should not want to be put to the test in English. I don’t know what English words I have ‘mastered’. I think they must be very few, and I am sure the number is vastly smaller in Latin. I think in my reading of Latin the word *res* has turned up, perhaps a thousand times; but I don’t know that I have mastered *res* yet. And I don’t think teachers know what they are talking about, when they speak of mastering six or seven hundred words. It means, perhaps, that their pupils have learned one meaning for each word, so that every time they see that particular word in a sentence with that meaning they shall recognize it. Now I believe that a knowledge of the meaning of four or five thousand words in Latin would be not too great an equipment for one who wanted to read Latin books with any sort of readiness. I also think that in the first year more words may be learned than are likely to be learned in any subsequent year. Now if six hundred words is about the right number, and if five thousand words is a moderate equipment to enable a person to read Latin with ease, then we have only to perform a little sum in arithmetic to ascertain how many years it will take to get the five thousand words, supposing the number of words learned in each successive year after the first is not greater than it is the first. It would take eight and one-third years. Six hundred words in the opinion of many teachers seems to be a sufficient number for the first year. There are two hundred school days in a year. Divide six hundred by two hundred, we have three for the quotient. The proposition, therefore, is that pupils should learn one meaning, possibly two meanings, of three words a day. This is the task proposed for learners of the average age of at least fifteen.

This reminds me of a book that I saw advertised some years ago with this attractive title: “Latin Without Tears, or One Word a Day.”

But there is a grave objection to this method of hammering into the pupil one or two meanings of a word, and I have seen it illustrated a great many times. If a boy has learned one meaning of a word, and that has been, as it were, hammered into him the first year, that is the meaning he ever afterwards wants to apply to it. He has seen, for example, *gero* the first year, and it has recurred over and over again, and he has learned to translate it "to wage", and he cannot get rid of the notion that *gero* means only "wage". It is a constant obstacle in the way of his seeing the meaning of his sentences, if *gero* happens to be used in some other sense. But I will not dwell upon this any longer.

I want to say a word with regard to what I conceive to be a grave error of method in the more advanced teaching; a grave error, because it is said to be the best way, and is declared, by a brilliant man and fine scholar, to have been highly successful. Probably every one here has read Mr. Hale's pamphlet on "The Art of Reading Latin." The gist of it is that the learner must look at each word in succession, fix his attention only upon one word at a time, and mentally exhaust all the possibilities of the construction of that one word before he proceeds to the next one. This is copiously and brilliantly illustrated. Mr. Hale also quotes from Mr. Gildersleeve with approval, a suggestion that the learner should have a card and make a hole in it, so that he can put it down over his text, and look through the card and see the one word at a time, and when he was formulated the possibilities of the construction of that word he is to lift the card along to the next word. This seems to me emphatically to illustrate how not to do it, and I think I have demonstrated to my own satisfaction by trial, that it is the worst way. Mr. Hale says that he has proved that this method is the speediest method of learning to read Latin, and that he has proved it in college in successive classes. I venture to doubt it, though I have no doubt that Professor Hale has taught his pupils to read Latin with brilliant success. I believe



that what he has attributed to this method has been due much more to personal influence. That his success has been due to the method, I should almost dare to deny with confidence. This method is based upon an assumption that is radically and completely erroneous. The assumption is that the process of divining the sense of a Latin sentence is an inductive and self-conscious one. It is often neither, and the opposite habit of mind, of trying to see the meaning directly without the intervention of self-conscious logic, is on all accounts to be cultivated.

I am well aware that I have done no more than clear the ground, if I have done as much, for the discussion of the question, but to occupy more of your time would be inexcusable, when one so abundantly qualified to treat the question exhaustively is to follow me; I mean the senior professor of Latin in this university

*Roxbury Latin School*

*William C. Collar*

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## HELLENIC EDUCATION—(Concluded)

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### THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE FEW IN THE 5TH CENTURY B. C. AND THEREAFTER

We have seen that the Athenian youth and boy had, so far as school instruction, primary, secondary, or higher was concerned, an easy time of it up to the middle of the 5th century B. C. And as historians of education, we have to note the fact that Greece was within sight of the highest pinnacle of its fame in arts and arms before school instruction took a more serious form. In Epic, Elegiac, Lyric, and Tragic Dramatic Poetry, all the greatest work had been done before 450 B. C., and in the subsequent 50 years philosophy, history, and even oratory and comedy had given almost all their greatest examples to the world.